

## 2005 White House Conference on Aging

### POST-EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

<b>NAME OF EVENT:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> Annual Arizona Indian Council on Aging
<b>DATE OF EVENT:</b>	April 26 – 29, 2005
<b>LOCATION OF EVENT:</b>	Tucson, Arizona
<b>NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING:</b>	850
<b>SPONSORING ORGANIZATION(S):</b>	Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. Area Agency on Aging, Region VIII Arizona Indian Council on Aging
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#### **ISSUE AREA: AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES**

**Priority Issue #1:** Home and Community Based Services to American Indian elders living in rural and isolated areas.

**Barriers:** Our Nation is enjoying a time of prosperity, and seniors are benefiting from science and research, reduction in the incidence of chronic illness for elders, increase in life expectancy, information being shared with seniors about health promotion, entitlement benefits, and caregiver support services. Although many advancements have been made to better the lives of American's seniors, times are still very hard for American Indian elders living in rural and isolated communities. Studies have shown that the health status is very poor among all minority groups. Three out of five American Indian elders live below the federal poverty level. The population of American Indian elders with disabilities is 50% higher than other seniors. Fifty percent (50%) of Tribal elders age 65 and older have hypertension while only 36% of the general population age 65 and older have hypertension. Forty-nine percent (49%) of Tribal elders age 65 and over have diabetes while only 10% of the general public age 65 and over have diabetes (NRCNAA- Report 98-3). The delivery of services to American Indian elders, individuals with disabilities, and family caregivers is difficult because of strict Federal guidelines and limited resources in tribal communities.

**Recommendations:** The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and the Arizona Indian Council on Aging support the following recommendations on policies affecting home and community based services for American Indian elders:

- Increase funding to States and Tribes that provide services to elders living in rural and remote areas. The cost to provide services to elders living in rural and remote areas is higher.

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- Create flexibility in the use of resources for elders, family caregivers, including elders that are caregivers to meet the unique needs of American Indians.
- Establish and provide funding for an American Indian Elderly Services Training Program in Title IV of the Older Americans Act to be provided by American Indian Tribes.
- Establish and provide funding for an Information and Resource Center for American Indian elders and Tribal service providers to be provided by American Indian Tribes.
- Develop and fund American Indian Geriatric Centers through Tribes and Tribal Organizations to support Tribal and rural communities in Arizona.

**Priority Issue #2: Lack of Long Term Care System in Tribal Communities**

**Barriers:** There is only one certified Tribal nursing home in the State of Arizona. Tribal communities do not have the resources for a system of long term care including nursing homes, adult day care, and assisted living facilities. The majority of elders requiring long term care services have to be placed in off-reservations facilities in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona. These off-reservation facilities are foreign to Tribal elders. American Indian elders experience language barriers and facility staff does not understand the culture of the American Indian elders in their care. As a result, many American Indian elders feel they are neglected and abandoned at these facilities. The majority of the tribal communities prefer that their elders stay in their own communities.

**Recommendations:** The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and the Arizona Indian Council on Aging support the following recommendations on policies affecting Long Term Care for American Indian elders and Individuals with disabilities.

- Increase the funding of Home and Community Based Services and Caregiver programs to continue to sustain the traditional community based systems of care.
- Build and develop Adult Day Care, Assisted Living, and resources for Tribes to assess the need for Nursing Home facilities on or off American Indian Reservations in order that Tribal elders do not have to relocate off the reservations and identify funds to sustain these programs.

**Priority Issue #3 Medicare, Medicaid, and other Entitlements.**

**Barriers:** The passage of the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 presents the largest transformation of the Medicare system since its inception in 1965. Among the major changes of the legislation are a Medicare-approved drug discount card, prescription drug benefit, inclusion of preventive benefits to new enrollees, Medicare Advantage Program, and increased access to quality health care in rural areas.

American Indian elders and individuals with disabilities living in rural areas have limited access to resources, if even available, due to remote location, lack of transportation, language and literacy barriers, and other culturally specific issues. It is the goal of the Public Benefits Outreach Project under the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA) Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to “reach out” to these beneficiaries to provide education about Medicare, Medicaid, and

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other entitlement program options. American Indian beneficiaries need to be aware of the benefits they may be entitled to in order to make informed decisions about their healthcare financing and delivery.

**Recommendations:** The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and the Arizona Indian Council on Aging support the following recommendations on policies affecting Medicare, Medicare, and other entitlements for American Indian elders and Individuals with disabilities.

- Waive premiums, coinsurance, deductibles, and other out-of-pocket costs for all American Indians in regards to Medicare and healthcare.
- Exempt potential and existing Medicare beneficiaries from any late penalties assessed for late enrollment into Medicare Part A, Part B, and Part D.
- Provide additional funding for Medicare enrollment and outreach to rural, isolated communities.
- Compose American Indian specific Medicare outreach and education materials.

**Priority Issue #4:** Impact of “Baby Boomers” in American Indian communities.

**Barriers:** Statistics show that over 26 million individuals born between 1946 and 1965 will soon be retiring. This influx will be evident in services provided to elders under the Older Americans Act, as the first Baby boomers will be eligible for OAA services in 2006. The U.S. Census 2000 data indicates that this trend will also affect American Indian communities, as they will be facing a population increase of up to 20–30% in the next 20 years. All programs (Federal, State, and Tribal) will face increased challenges in providing services to Tribal communities. Programs have already been experiencing staff-shortages, lack of supplies and equipment, lack of technology, and facilities inadequacy. The baby boomer generation will only add more concerns, specifically the lack of funding for maintaining programs.

**Recommendations:**

The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and the Arizona Indian Council on Aging support the following recommendations on policies affecting the American Indian “Baby Boomer Generation”.

- Increase and sustain OAA Title III and VI funding to Tribal communities.
- Increase employment opportunities for retired seniors to continue healthy, active lifestyles and remain productive in their communities.
- Increase volunteer opportunities in rural areas.
- Increase health promotion and awareness campaigns.
- Increase pre-retirement counseling opportunities for baby boomers.
- Increase information on retirement and benefits.
- Increase the availability of funding to meet the educational needs of the increasing population in regards to available benefits, i.e. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, etc.

**Priority Issue #5:** Elder Abuse in American Indian Communities.

**Barriers:** Elder Abuse in tribal communities occurs in the forms of physical violence, neglect, and financial exploitation. Elder Abuse is increasing as the Tribal elderly populations increase. The development of Tribal policies and programs that address elder abuse has been slow in various tribal communities. Some tribal communities no longer employ the use of culturally relevant methods to protect their elders. Arizona Tribal communities are evolving into a predominantly younger population, thus leaving much of the care-giving responsibilities to the younger populations; who may not be willing or equipped to care for the advancing elderly populations. The Tribes that have existing elder abuse programs are often under-funded and unable to meet the demands of such services. Many of the Tribal communities have not established Adult Protective Services codes or programs to address the growing need for elderly services. Contributing factors to elder abuse includes financial hardship, caregiver stress, substance abuse, and lack of enforceable codes or procedures to address elder abuse in tribal communities.

**Recommendations:** The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and the Arizona Indian Council on Aging support the following recommendations on policies regarding the prevention of elder abuse in American Indian communities.

- Provide adequate funding at the Federal and Tribal level to develop and enhance culturally relevant elder abuse prevention services including family stability.
- Develop Tribal adult protection services or culturally appropriate elder rights systems within Tribal reservations.
- Increase community awareness and understanding of elder abuse through Federal, State, and Tribal collaboration.
- Implement training and education to combat elder abuse for a wide range of professionals, particularly those working in senior services, social services, and law enforcement.
- Expand the ombudsman services to advocate for more Tribal elders in nursing facilities.
- Create stricter federal and tribal laws or penalties for individuals that supply, create, or distribute Methamphetamine and other illegal drugs.
- Protect the identify of elders by not using their Social Security Numbers in reporting systems.
- Develop interagency agreements between Federal, States, and Tribes to protect elders.
- Increase funding in Title VII of the Older Americans Act.
- Establish and fund an American Indian Elder Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Program in Title VII of the Older Americans Act.

**Background:**

The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA) is addressing the need for elderly services in rural and isolated American Indian communities throughout Arizona. The ITCA Area Agency on Aging (AAA), Region VIII represents 20 tribal governments within the state boundaries of Arizona. Currently the ITCA AAA subcontracts with 18 tribes providing services to approximately 8,000 elders. The 18 tribes within Region VIII are located throughout the state in such remote areas as the bottom of Grand Canyon to the fringes of the urban communities of

Phoenix and Tucson, AZ. ITCA AAA provides ninety-five percent (95%) of its services to low income American Indian elders, and the population is growing at a rapid pace. Nearly twenty-nine percent (29%) of American Indian elders are below the federal poverty level, which is nearly three times the rate of poverty of non-Indian persons over the age of 60.

Many Tribal elders live in isolated and rural communities, creating various barriers and challenges for our Area Agency on Aging to address; by using creative and resourceful means we are able to meet some of the needs, however, the lack of funding and resources will continue at significant barriers as our aging population continues to grow. Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc., Area Agency on Aging will continue to advocate for funding and resources to support the needs of the First People of Arizona.